

Testimony of Steven Miller In Support of Funding for Connecticut Legal Services

2/9/10

Good evening members of the committee, my name is Steven Miller, and this is my wife Denise Miller. We are here tonight in support of funding for Connecticut Legal Services and to share how they helped us.

We live in Shelton CT with our 5 year old son and 7 year old daughter. After years of living with family in Shelton, we saved to get our own home. It was important for us to remain in Shelton, mainly because it was best for our autistic daughter. The previous school year we fought to get an appropriate school program for her. Not only did we not want to start all over again with getting to know another school district, but also our daughter's disability makes it difficult for her to adjust to change.

We ended up purchasing an old fixer-upper farmhouse in Shelton that is a minute from our family. After we moved in, our 5 year old son started having very bad allergies. From an allergist we learned that it was likely our old house that was making him sick. Trying to do what was best for our son, we started extensive renovations ourselves-we worked during the day and then I worked on the house at night. During renovations, the house was unsafe so we spent nights at our daycare business in the town next door. Soon after we started renovations, the Shelton Board of Education notified us that we were no longer residents and our daughter could no longer go to school in Shelton. We were also offered a hearing at the Board of Education to prove that we were in fact residents.

Scared about the possibility of Shelton kicking our daughter out of school, we immediately asked for a hearing and moved back in with our extended family in Shelton. We thought it was all a simple misunderstanding and once we told the Board of Education about the renovation and they saw our deed, driver's licenses, car registration, and taxes and bills we thought we could move on with our life. My wife attended the hearing so I could run our business. When she came home in tears and told me we lost the hearing, I couldn't believe it. She explained to me how awful the experience was. We didn't expect or prepare for a formal proceeding. We didn't know anything about being asked questions by a lawyer, asking witnesses questions, or evidence. We tried to do it ourselves, but we were blindsided by the process, and now our autistic daughter had nowhere to go to school.

Knowing that we could not afford an attorney we didn't know where to go for help. Then our furnace failed, meaning it would be even longer before we could move back into our house and have somewhere for our daughter to attend school. Our family doctor told us to contact Connecticut Legal Services. Attorney Jillian Griswold and Attorney Anne Louise Blanchard agreed to represent us at the appeal. Having representation at the 2nd hearing made all the difference. Connecticut Legal Services explained the law to us and prepared us for the hearing. After listening to our side of the case at the hearing, Shelton withdrew their decision that we were not residents of the town and told us our daughter could keep attending school. Without the help and legal expertise from Connecticut Legal Services, we don't know what we would have done.